

THE LIVING AGE

Founded by E. LITTELL in 1844



Saturday, March 8

Lenine and His
Programme

American
Materialism

The Brontës through
French Eyes

An Abraham
Lincoln Drama



THE LIVING AGE

FOR NEXT WEEK WILL CONTAIN AMONG OTHER THINGS

THE BRITISH NATION AND THE GREAT STRIKES

The labor upheavals in Great Britain are the most significant matters of the day. The Premier has declared that there is a real danger of revolution. Mr. J. R. Clynes, one of the leaders of the Labor Group, discusses the strike and the strikers.

ITALY'S CHOICE

By Signor Salandra

The distinguished statesman reveals to a correspondent of the *Paris Matin* the secret history of the Italian crisis of August, 1914.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN BELGIUM

By Vicomte Davignon

SOCIALIZATION: Its Benefits and Dangers

An exceedingly able criticism of the great theory of the day.

NIGHT BOMBING: An Aviator's Story

MR. CECIL CHESTERTON'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

SOCIAL REFORM AND EFFICIENCY

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BOTH lovers of Lincoln and of dramatic literature, we gladly welcome Mr. John Drinkwater's play, *Abraham Lincoln*, the latest addition to Lincoln literature, and the first attempt, as far as we know—at any rate in this country—to put the pathos and drama of the great President on the stage. It is always a matter of surprise and regret to us that our dramatic authors should so persistently elevate one passion, that of sex, above all others, and neglect those of equal force—ambition, power, revenge, patriotism, and sacrifice. Their great prototype, the arch-interpreter of humanity, knew better. He saw life in a juster proportion, as he has proved for all time in *Julius Caesar*, in *Macbeth*, in *Coriolanus*. He had in *excelsis* the power to see the drama of character. Dramatic history holds brilliant examples of followers of Shakespeare's traditions, and in our own day a notable instance is Mr. John Masefield with *Philip of Spain* and *Good Friday*. But the followers are astonishingly few when one reflects on the inspiration which history offers. Names leap to the mind of heroic or conspicuous figures that must, it seems, inspire great epics and dramas.

Mr. Drinkwater's play is marked by admirable restraint, simplicity, and dignity. The action covers the period from Lincoln's acceptance of the invitation to stand for the Presidency to his assassination by the fanatic Booth. Covering so wide a period and so many events, it is of necessity a series of incidents. These are set out in six scenes, and to link the incidents together the author has adopted the

classic method of the Chorus, recited by two Chroniclers. This Chorus is in irregular rhymed verse, which, if not always inspired, is accomplished throughout, and at times shows much descriptive power. Take, for instance, the introduction to Scene II, after Lincoln's acceptance of his great task, which begins:

Lonely is the man who understands,
Lonely is vision that leads a man away
From the pasture-lands
From the furrows of corn and the brown
loads of hay,
To the mountain-side,
To the high places where contemplation
brings
All his adventurings
Among the sowers and the tillers in the
wide
Valleys to one fused experience,
That shall control
The courses of his soul,
And give his hand
Courage and continence.

For his study of his hero Mr. Drinkwater is much indebted, he tells us, to Lord Charnwood's *Life of Lincoln*, and his conception of Lincoln's character follows very much the lines of that able book. Though we are shown Lincoln's invincible honesty, his detestation of cant, his devoutness of mind, he is by no means a plaster saint. There is a glimpse here and there of his humor, of which we think we might have been allowed to see more; of his abrupt methods, of his peculiarities. His uncouth appearance and manners are dwelt upon, but Mr. Drinkwater is too true an artist ever to permit him to become the buffoon. 'There are some, shall we say graces?' says Lincoln to the Delegation, 'that I lack. Washington does not altogether neglect these.' 'If you send me,' he adds,

'the South will have little but derision for your choice.' 'We believe that you'll last out their laughter,' says a delegate. 'I can take any man's ridicule,' comes the quick reply, 'I'm trained to it by a . . . somewhat odd figure that it pleased God to give me, if I may so far be pleasant with you.' We see comparatively little of Lincoln on the domestic side. The records give no very clear picture of Mrs. Lincoln, and Mr. Drinkwater has deduced a somewhat shrewish if picturesque figure. But though the social scenes are pleasant and adequate enough, it is, in our opinion, with Lincoln as statesman and philosopher that Mr. Drinkwater is at his best. Here he has caught the true Lincoln spirit. Lincoln's wonderful insight, his quick mind, his unflinching honesty, his humanity, his power to stand alone, are all excellently shown. The whole scene between Seward, the two Southern delegates, and the President, where Lincoln discovers that his friend and colleague is in danger of being led into intrigue, could not be bettered. Seward is at first for some compromise: 'It's devastating, this thought of war.' 'It is,' responds Lincoln quickly. 'Do you think I'm less sensible of that than you? War should be impossible. But you can only make it impossible by destroying its causes'—words the force of which have come home to all of us during the past years of heroic agony. The fatal decision of the South is shown in one short quick interlude, with few words, but those of mighty import, which leave a dramatic silence behind them. We do not quite agree with Mr. Drinkwater in Lincoln's emotional outburst at the close of this scene, moving though it is. Much more in character, we feel, and wholly in keeping with Lincoln's 'Shakespeare habit,' is his comment a moment or two later:

'There is a tide in the affairs of men. . . .'
Do you read Shakespeare, Seward?

Seward: Shakespeare? No.

Lincoln: Ah!

Lincoln's predilection for quotation, which must have been—and was, according to the play—at times extremely irritating to his friends and acquaintance, is exemplified in other scenes. With his Cabinet on tenterhooks of excitement over the successful turn of the war, he persists in reading a long extract from his pet writer, Artemus Ward, and is unmoved by their resentment. Lincoln has to meet opposition and dissension in his Cabinet, and does so with considerateness but determination. They are not with him on the question of the Proclamation to the Slaves. Lincoln is bold enough to assume the sole responsibility of the decision, if need be. 'I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself. This I say without intending anything but respect for any one of you. But I beg you to stand with me in this thing.'

Hook: I mistrust your judgment.

Lincoln: In what?

Hook: Generally. You over-emphasize abolition.

Lincoln: You don't mean that. You mean that you fear possible public feeling against abolition.

Hook: It must be persuaded, not forced.

Lincoln: All the most worthy elements in it are persuaded. But the ungenerous elements make the most noise, and you hear them only. . . .

Hook: You have, in my opinion, failed in necessary firmness in saying what will be the individual penalties of rebellion.

Lincoln: This is a war. I will not allow it to become a blood-feud.

Hook: We are fighting treason. We must meet it with severity.

Lincoln: We will defeat treason. And I will meet it with conciliation.

Hook: It is a policy of weakness.

Lincoln: It is a policy of faith—it is a policy of compassion.

Another admirable scene is that between Lincoln and the negro, Douglass. The emotion of the negro is all the more moving from being kept in check by Lincoln's kindly common sense. 'Just two old men,' says the President, urging Douglass to sit down with him, 'sitting together and talking.' The scene provides an opportunity for an excellent definition — and condemnation — of the policy of reprisals. Southern soldiers have murdered black prisoners. Douglass wants revenge. 'Don't ask me for reprisals,' says Lincoln.

Douglass (gleaming): Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

Lincoln: No, no. You must think. Think what you are saying.

Douglass: I think of murdered black men.

Lincoln: You would not ask me to murder?

Douglass: Punish — not murder.

Lincoln: Yes, murder. How can I kill men in cold blood for what has been done by others? Think what would follow. It is for us to set a great example, not to follow a wicked one.

Mr. Drinkwater is not quite so happy in the interview between Lincoln and the two women representing strongly contrasted sets of opinion, both extreme. While Douglass is a distinct personality, Mrs. Otherly and Mrs. Goliath Blow are never more than types, though well-drawn types. The scene, however, gives occasion for an admirable exposition of Lincoln's views on war:

I too believe war to be wrong. It is the weakness and the jealousy and the folly of men that make a thing so wrong possible. But we are all weak, and jealous, and foolish. That's how the world is, ma'am, and we cannot outstrip the world. Some of the worst of us are sullen, aggressive still — just clumsy, greedy pirates. Some of us have grown out of that. But the best of us have an instinct to resist aggression if it won't listen to persuasion. You may say it is a wrong instinct. I don't know. But it's there, and it's there in millions of

good men. I don't believe it's a wrong instinct. I believe that the world must come to wisdom slowly.

A sense of tragedy, of necessity, pervades the play. We all know that the assassin's knife is waiting at the close. This sense of tragedy, when the play is acted, becomes almost overwhelming. Perhaps Mr. Drinkwater in the lines of the Chorus insists rather more on the 'glooms of fate' that hang over Lincoln than on the inspiration that carried him on, and this emphasis is more noticeable when the Chorus is recited than when read in the library; perhaps it is inherent in the awkward yet lovable and dignified figure of Lincoln going so confidently and unknowingly to death. At the moment when, in the scene at the theatre, Lincoln has been forced to his feet to reply to his applauding countrymen, the blow is struck:

A wind blows, and the brain
Is the dust that was its birth.

A friend standing by says reverently, 'Now he belongs to the ages.' We wish that in this closing scene Mr. Drinkwater had included the dramatic incident where Booth, having struck the blow, held up his dripping dagger and shouted, '*Sic Semper Tyrannis*' ('So always with tyrants'). An audience which included many Virginians, as the murderer knew, could appreciate the point, for *Sic Semper Tyrannis* is the motto of the State of Virginia. The incident, we think, would have been very effective on the stage, and would have had the added advantage of giving some hint of Booth's motive — knowledge of which is assumed as the play stands. The production of the play by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre was thoroughly in keeping with its character, being simple and impressive. Stage decoration was at a minimum — indeed, the bareness of

the President's room at Washington was almost startling to our modern ideas. Two or three incidents or scenes of special beauty or dramatic significance stand out in the memory — Lincoln, alone in his room, gazing silently at the map of his beloved country; the interview between Lincoln and Douglass, played with admirable restraint and artistic finish; Susan, the maid, and Douglass listening to the singing of 'John Brown's Body' by the crowd as it passes by Lincoln's house and goes into the distance; Lincoln's interview with the young soldier, Scott;

The Spectator

and the surrender of General Lee. It is to the credit of Birmingham that it should not only have produced *Abraham Lincoln*, but given it the whole-hearted support which it received. It is to the discredit of London that in the greatest city of the Empire we so seldom get the pleasure and inspiration that come from the dramatic study of heroic characters and actions:

This is the wonder, always, everywhere —
Not that vast mutability which is event,
The pits and pinnacles of change,
But man's desire and valiance that range
All circumstance, and come to port unspent.

LEAR ON THE GREAT WAR

My nephew and niece are never allowed to see or hear anything without receiving a reasoned explanation of it. They can tell you where all their toys were made, and they know that the Nursery Rhyme is only history in its first and most valuable form. No respect for Crown or Cloth has prevented my sister-in-law's teaching them that 'Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie' refers to an early-nineteenth-century monarch of regrettable tendencies, and that 'Little Jack Horner' represents a divine of a still earlier date renowned for his self-seeking proclivities.

It was in the hope of inculcating the value of nonsense for nonsense's sake that I recently presented them with the works of the immortal Mr. Lear. I followed up the gift with a call that same afternoon, and, much to my gratification, found them seated side by side at the playroom table with the book between them. They thanked me politely and invited me to 'come and

help them.' Miss Caedmon-Smith, their governess, sat in the window, absorbed in a volume of what I took to be *Hibbert's Journal*.

Lear's book stood open at the episode of the Old Person of Spain who hated all trouble and pain.

'Ah,' I said genially, feeling more at my ease with the children than I had for a long time — 'ah! "that umbrageous Old Person" worries you, does he?'

'Oh, no,' said Clarence, 'Spain's quite easy, thank you;

'He sat on a chair
With his feet in the air

means being a nootral, of course. And the Old Person of Rheims who was troubled with horrible dreams is easy too; of course they could n't sleep quietly even in cellars with the guns——'

'But *I* don't fink it's velly kind to make fun about it, do you,